# TRANSCRIPT—CISSY DENDY

**Interviewee:** Cissy Dendy

**Interviewer:** Zoe Rhine and Louise Maret

**Interview Date:** April 27, 2017

**Location:** 45 Madison Avenue, Asheville, N.C. (Home of Cissy Dendy)

**Length:** 1 digital recording; 01:04:17

**Transcriber:** Alice Helms

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Zoe Rhine: Today is April 27, 2017. Zoe Rhine, Librarian and Volunteer Louise Maret are visiting with Cissy Dendy at her house at 45 Madison Avenue.

Louise Maret: Your address is 45 Madison Avenue, and you said that you grew up here.

Cissy Dendy: Yes.

LM: In this house. Could you tell me the full names of your parents?

CD: My father's name was John Brooks Dendy. Mom is Majorie McClain Dendy.

LM: And your grandparents, were they from Asheville also?

CD: My mom's parents, Henrietta and Orange McClain, yes. My father's family, no. He and his mom and siblings moved from Lawrence, South Carolina when he was a child and his father stayed in Lawrence.

LM: Were you born in this house? Were you born in Asheville?

CD: No. None of my mother's children were born in Asheville.

LM: So where were you born?

CD: Newark, New Jersey.

LM: And what was your birthdate?

CD: April 16, 1948. I turned sixty-nine on Easter Sunday.

LM: That's a special time. I'm the seventeenth. I turned sixty-five. Okay, so you moved into this house in the 1940s?

CD: No, my parents did. I wasn't born until forty-eight. [Laughter.] Dad and his mom were renting along with his sister, 73 Madison Avenue, which is down the street on this side. In June of 1940, he divorced the first wife who was living on Short Madison, which is half block that way, married my mom in June of 1940, bought this house and moved in here. So it was him, his sister, I think Corine, his mother and my mom. Here, mid-nineteen forties.

LM: Okay, and then you were born in New Jersey.

CD: 1948.

LM: And then you moved here when?

CD: Well I came to live with my parents a little after I was born but it ended up me going back to New Jersey because I was sick.

LM: Tell me, what was it like growing up right here? When did you come back here to live? Do you remember?

CD: For me personally, I think I was close to three, so that would have put me in—around fifty-one, I think, full-time. In and out, but around full-time I was about three when I came back. My brother was already here with my parents of course and by that time my little brother was here. But I had been the sick kid so I was in New Jersey where I could get better medical care. What was it like? For me, it was I think, fun. When I talk to some of my friends, who were growing up in the "hood at the same time, they apparently didn't have as much fun as I did. [Laughter.] And I think that was because my father and mother sort of gave us—they both worked so—. Everybody goes on about those latch-key kids? You just didn't lock the door. And your kids knew where they were supposed to be. But with my father's sister and her husband right down the corner, our play aunt and uncle right there in that little orange house with their kids who were the same age, everybody still working and my mother's cousin around on Crescent Street, we had pretty damn good covering. Back in the day, there were a lot of adults in this neighborhood who didn't have children, and the rule was, if you needed to pee or get a glass of water, that's where you could run. I could go to Miss Johnson's house if I was playing with Terry. I didn't have to come back here. I could go across the street to Uncle Rooney's house. But if I stepped out of line, any one of them could slap, hit, kill, whatever. [Laughter]. And then they would report to your parents when they got home. So you had parents all over the place. It wasn't like you had to have a babysitter.

LM: So the places that you're pointing to are all within a block radius.

CD: Yeah. Like my range for my little kid self was—let's see, Cynthia's was one, two, three, four houses down that way. So I might have been at here place. I liked Cynthia but I pretty much didn't like her mother. She didn't like her mother either, so we weren't actually going to be at her house unless we had to be at her house. Her cousins were right there, the McKissicks, so she could be right there. The little gray funky house right across the street there. That was the McKissicks. Their children were all grown but their grandkids were close by. So grandkids visiting, we were probably there, Fields kids right here. My best friend, Terry Johnson and her little brother Darrell were like from the corner, they were like one house up on the other side, so very close at hand. And then the Offards, which was one, two, three up on Broad this way, with three kids. There were three kids, two kids, three kids, three kids. One, two, Proctor house, the green house two down, I think they ended up with five or six kids but they had three kids in our range. So the little three, three, threes all over the place. Either you had no children, or you had one adopted child, or you had three kids, and if you went beyond that it was scandalous.

LM: So the house you pointed to is—.

CD: The little orange house right there?

LM: Is it sixteen? Is that what that number is? The numbers maybe have been different back then too.

CD: No, no no. They were the same, it's just that right now I'm not thinking of that number, that's what's Maggie's house now.

LM: And she gave us a nice history of the street that she lives on.

CD: And in the little history, that's the thing. I sort of tell you which houses were who and who lived where. There were like these little groups of kids. There was Terry and Darrell, the Offords, and Veeda's the one I got her grandfather's car. Thea. And we were all like pretty much stair stepped in terms of ages so Veeda and Butch are about the same age, me and Bubba were the same age, Edward and Kenneth were the same age. Harold, Hilda and Danny, we were all like that. We had these little packs of three, three, three. Except for like Proctors, she went wild and had five, six or seven. But she's got grown kids around here.

LM: Who lived in the house here with you?

CD: When I was growing up, it was my mother, father, me and my two brothers.

LM: Any other particular interesting people who lived around here that you could—.

CD: Oh dear God.

LM: Tell us some stories about them.

CD: Okay. Chestnut to Broad. First house facing this way was Leamon Williams, who was I think the second Black police officer in Asheville. I said in my little thing that first and second cops were on this street. It's actually second and third. Leamon Williams was second; Harold Fields, our play uncle was the third. Lucy Herring, who the school is named after, who was the educator, was the first house on Broad facing this way on this corner.

LM: On Broad?

CD: Yes. I don't remember the family that lived over there. My brother does but I went to high school with the girl and her father became like the Chief Minister, or whatever it is, I think at Tuskegee. Harold of course was third police officer in Asheville and his son Harold who is my age—. All the kids, this house, that house, all did civil rights stuff so his son integrated the law school in Miami, Florida. I integrated, was one of the six kids integrating the undergraduate school at Vanderbilt University. The McKissick family, their oldest son Floyd, integrated the law school in North Carolina. His son, another Floyd, is currently a Black senator here in the state of North Carolina and that family was the folks who did with Nixon, Soul City, North Carolina. A Black development and one of the first Black millionaire families in North Carolina. That family. The little yellow house right there was Miss Vance who made the world's best blueberry cobbler and cooked for folks but that was a boarding house for Black baseball. So when we were real little, real little. Jackie Robinson had stayed there before we were there, before he integrated baseball. Roy Campanella and all those folks were always coming back to visit Miss Vance and there was still some Black baseball going on. Our father, who had been a golf pro, knew some of those guys and we used to hang out with those guys. This house right here that looks like holy hell, was Dr. Frank Tolliver, the house next door, who was the principal of Stephens-Lee. He went on to become the head of the Black school system for North Carolina and was replaced by Mr. Belton who was the last principal for Stephens-Lee before integration and they closed our high school. Next house to them was the Harris's who owned the drugstore which was the big Black business in the YMI downtown, YMI Drugstore. Interesting street? Oh, hell yeah. This whole street was—I called it in my little write-up—a striver's row for Asheville. The running jokes,

Galloways who still visit and used to live down on Crescent Street, says the Black streets were Broad from Washington to Charlotte, Madison from East Chestnut to where it ends, which is Hillside, Crescent Street, which curves around and comes from Broad back to Madison, and North Crescent which kind of goes down the hill to Clyde. Those were the Black streets, the rest of this was white. My understanding of city rules is that in this little neighborhood, Washington was white when we grew up and Arthur was telling me, "Do you remember when we used to walk down Washington and they used to throw things at us?" I said, "Well, I was a dog walker." And also every summer almost I got to go to New Jersey where the family was. And it was an issue with some of the little white kids acting like jerks and throwing things at you, but my cure for that was to get a zip gun from some gangsters in New Jersey. A zip gun would put a nail that's that long, like a big nail, put it three inches into a concrete block. So if I hit you, I'm going to hurt you. If I hit your face, I'm taking out your eye and pumping your brains. All I have to do is shoot to hit the thing and say I would stop.

LM: Did you ever do that?

CD: Did I ever hit a kid with it? If I did, I wouldn't tell you now, because you're fixing to publish this shit and I could go to jail, assuming I killed somebody. [Laughter]. But here's the thing, the other thing I had was the little metal paperclips. If you twisted it out and took one end of it, you could sharpen the point and fire it with a rubber band and that would hurt if you got somebody in the face. That would also blind them if you got them in the eye. So a few of those and you actually go them to stop throwing shit at you as you walked down the street. Because you clearly meant to do them harm.

LM: Their parents didn't come out and yell at them for doing that?

CD: Do I look stupid enough to stand there while they're screaming and hollering? [Laughter]. I told you I was walking dogs. My thing was not babysitting but dog walking. I walked everywhere with the dogs and generally speaking people left me alone because a little girl does not look dangerous but a little girl can be just as dangerous as a big person.

LM: Especially if it's Cissy Dendy.

CD: Well, it was a case of I didn't start it, but I know how to finish it. Okay? So, it's like, "Keep it up, right? I'm going to give you a couple of shots but if you hit me or one of the dogs, I'm going to take care of you. Because if I don't, all I have to do is say something to my uncle, say something to my cousins, and they'll come around here with guns and it's going to be on. So you need to stop being ignorant because you're going to get your whole family wiped out screaming at me." And they pretty much did.

LM: You are from New Jersey. [Laughter].

CD: No, I'm from right here and I'm going to tell you why all of us were born in New Jersey. In the 1940s, my mom had difficulty delivering, and she had I think several miscarriages. She really wanted to be a mother. The rules here was that Mission Hospital was supported by county and city tax money so if you were a property owner, you paid for that hospital. If you were Black, there were segregated wards. If all you needed to do was to have a baby, the only way you were getting in there to have a baby is if two doctors signed off and said your life was in danger if you had it outside of the hospital. There was only one Black doctor and he lived about four doors down the street, Dr.

White. So even though my father knew doctors at Biltmore Forest and stuff like that, they weren't getting an obstetrician and they weren't going to deal with a woman who wanted to have a baby who was Black. So my mother's family in New Jersey said, "To hell with that. Come up here. We have access to any doctor we want up here." So when she got pregnant—she actually said she talked to this doctor my aunt sent her to, he said, "Listen, if you keep doing this then you're honestly going to kill yourself. Your life really is in danger here. Tell me what it is you're trying to do," and she said, "I want kids," and he said, "How many?" "Three," and he said, "Really. Boys, girls, what?" She goes, "Boy, girl, boy." And he goes, "And when would you like to have them?" She said, "I want them less than two years apart so they can be friends." He said, "I'm going to help you do that and then I'm going to do a hysterectomy." We are seventeen to nineteen months apart. We are boy, girl, boy. [Laughter.] Then she had the hysterectomy. So, all of us got born at the hospital. She got early family planning. She went extreme. I thought, "Damn, Ma," and she goes, "Yeah, it worked. Dad did what he was told." And we knew it wasn't a problem with Dad. He already had a son, I have half brothers. We knew it wasn't a problem with Dad, it was Mom. And she had a difficulty carrying to term. And nobody around here was going to help. Especially Mission Hospital. There actually was a Black hospital, right there on Biltmore Avenue. You know where the ballpark is? You know where Wild Wings is, Ellison's law firm? That used to be a Black hospital before it was a Black funeral home and then it was a law office.

LM: Right. It's not there anymore.

CD: No, it's a lot now. I don't know what building on it now. It's across from a brewery. That would have been the other option.

LM: That was the Black hospital. Were your parents close to Lucy Herring?

CD: Not that I know of.

LM: Did the neighborhood have gatherings, you know when you would all—.

CD: Get-togethers?

LM: Block parties or celebrations of any kind? I know the kids did probably.

CD: No, we didn't. We had approved play lists, desired-children-at-your-party lists. It was a bunch of snobs on this street. You know what Strivers Row is? All right white people. I'm sick of you all. Pick up a history book about Harlem Renaissance and Harlem, nineteen-twenties, whatever it is? There's a whole section that's still called Strivers Row and it's where Black people who were middle class really wanted to educate their kids, follow the law, be patriots, be artists, doctors and lawyers. So Strivers Row was where you controlled the size of your family because you can't support but so many, right? If you want to raise them up so that their standard of living is better than you, this is middle class stuff. Middle class parents want upper middle class children. Upper middle class parents want rich children and so forth. That's what strivers are. Harlem had that and this was Asheville's Strivers Row. Women who were teachers and half the area here, Lucy Herring and all that, principals at the schools and stuff like that—all here. The only Black doctor—here. First cops—here. So this was Strivers Row. The people who lived down on Crescent were like, you could get invited up here to play. If somebody's parents were influential, powerful, whatever it was, or could help parents get jobs, which up here, these parents could. My father could. He could. Then it was a

societal thing. And then there were the clubs—Elites, Carletons and all of that, who didn't all necessarily live over here. And then there was the educators who had their own little thing. And the only reason educators were here at this house, was because of my mother who was cultured. So if you want to know what a place setting at a formal dinner thing should look like, if you want to know what a garden should look like, if you want to know makeup and all that—you probably needed to make friends with Marge because she was the arbiter of that stuff. And she's got the tomboy. People are coming over to watch her get dressed and she's got a little tomboy. She loved it, she's like, "I don't want you to be like this. I want you to be different." The only reason I turned out the way I did was I had the most amazing mother on the planet.

LM: Did she encourage you to start a career and all that?

CD: No. She encouraged me to do whatever the hell I wanted to. Like, "Decide now whether you're going to be a doormat," she would say. Because whatever you decide, that's what's going to happen. And then she hung that Emile Zola thing on the wall, "They ask me why I'm here, why I was born, I will tell them I was born to live out loud." [Laughter]. So when you've got that going on, right? But she used to have these issues where every once in a while she'd want a little girl she could dress up with and do makeup and hair. She'd would have those days and I said, "We don't have a problem here because Aunt Ruby is a tomboy, right?" And her daughter Hilda is dying to have a mother who wants to do hair and makeup. Hilda's nickname is Lala. And I said, "All we have to do is do a swap for the day. I can not shave my armpits, not wear a bra, put on my tank top, smoke a cigarette and drink a beer out of a can. Chilling with Rubes for the day. You and Hilda can go get your hair done. ( ) Put on your makeup and sweat, right?

Whatever. End of the day, swap back." And if we're not ready to swap back, anytime we were in trouble, right over there was where we were. Because they were going to keep my parents from killing us. Not my mother, she may hit, but Daddy would try to kill you. And anytime Harold was ready to kill his? They were over here. Christmas toys? Where were they? Theirs was here, ours were over there. How did you find out that there was no Santa? Hey Maggie! How you doing? How did you find out there was no Santa? This was my brother's room, this is my room now. See that little window right there? With the squares on it? Christmas Eve, I think it was kind of snowy and funky out here and I was getting this little piano, little toy piano that you could really play on one of those things, about that tall? They had it hid over there, because we stomped in the closets and everything. But Uncle Harold was tasked with bringing it across here, because my father didn't do Christmas, he poured drinks but he didn't do Christmas. His task was bringing this sucker over here and as somebody went through the street there and almost hit Uncle Harold and he dropped the thing and it went off and we heard it, so we went to the window. Okay, that settles that. There is no Santa. Uncle Harold is him. They got together and did some—my parents had dinner parties and stuff but their dinner party guests were not generally the people in the neighborhood unless it was Harold and Ruby or—

LM: Who did they hang out with?

CD: The Carletons, and the Elites. And Daddy would invite Skyland Golf people because he helped open that club. He's a golfer.

LM: I remember you telling me. So, for the record, tell us a little bit more about what your dad did and__

CD: Well, his life ended in 1940s is what I told you. He got killed because he married Marge and moved the both of them. But he was, through the 1930s, a golf pro. He dropped out of college to go pro. So no Black people were paying golfers, but there were ( ). He went all over the place being sponsored for golf tournaments. During the time he was here he worked at what was Asheville Country Club, but is now the club that Grove Park Inn owns. Whatever it is. 1940, around the time he married Mom, he went out to work at Biltmore Forest Country Club. So the whole time that we were alive until he retired and died, he was at Biltmore Forest Club, he managed the men's locker room and the bar and the grill. So he was always around golf. He worked six days a week at Biltmore and then on his day off, he would get his hair cut, pick up his dry cleaning or drop it off, pay all accounts in cash because he didn't believe in debts. He'd run around and paid off his debts, and then he would go play golf.

LM: So where did he play golf then?

CD: Muni. Municipal. He was one of the ones who got it opened up to Blacks. And then he was instrumental in helping to form the Skyland Golf Association, which was golf tournaments for Black people. At Muni. It's still around. I understand they have hardships and sponsorships but it's no longer Black, it's now integrated.

LM: So when did your father die?

CD: Eighty-five. But he worked at Biltmore from 1940 to 1980, I think, 1982. So his whole life. I told him, I said, "You can see on the trophies and things that, on the books, the pictures we've seen of the trophies, that from thirty-one, thirty-two, all the way in, everything including all the newspaper clippings, a lot of which I have from his sister—everything ended in 1940." And I said, "That's it, huh? Married Marge, no more professional golf, no more living large, just six days a week working, with three kids that you never even wanted. You poor fool. Your life came to an end, huh Daddy?" And he goes, "That's an interesting way to look at it, " and I said, "Yeah, well." [Laughter]. Poor baby. That's when he had to quote grow up. It wasn't his idea though. He resisted.

LM: He did not want to.

CD: He managed to get around a lot of it, and that's part of why life was fun. My father's friends was everybody at Biltmore Forest Country Club. And that means Black or white, if that's the situation in Asheville in the fifties and the sixties. We had an easy ride. Our ride was always a lot easier because of whose children we were. It definitely put Black people on notice not to mess with you. And then it put most white people on notice to be careful. Because the white people of Biltmore Forest protected us as well as my father.

LM: Where did you first go to school here?

CD: We called it Hill Street School then. You all have renamed it Isaac Dixon now.

LM: I did not rename it.

CD: White people renamed it.

LM: You started in first grade?

CD: I did. I went first grade through eighth at Hill Street.

LM: Then you went to—.

CD: Allen. Allen High School.

LM: You never went to Stephens-Lee?

CD: ( ). [Laughter]. My brothers did though. That was part of the thing, when Tolliver left Stephens-Lee, he went on to Raleigh to become the head of the Black school system and my father's cousin was the head of the South Carolina Black school system. So most Black teachers around here and white teachers knew also, Dendy children, you probably don't want to scream at them. Because the heads of the school system thought we were amazing. [Laughter].

LM: So your parents had to pay for you to go to Allen School?

CD: How do I explain this one? Mom helped. Dad felt if public school was good enough for him, it was good enough for me. So I had to work, but we all had to work anyway, because my father did not believe in lazy children. He also didn't believe in arguing with a headstrong child. At age ten, he started charging me rent on my room and pro-rated utilities.

LM: Are you serious?

CD: And when I decided I was going to Allen, he goes, "I'm not paying for it," and I said, "Who asked you?" Only I cleaned that up for you. Who asked you?

LM: [Laughter]. Well, come on, I want to hear what you really said to him.

CD: Never mind. ( ) can still be killed. But the deal was, I was essentially without ever going to court, an emancipated minor. So the only thing he felt he had to pay for was medical. Marge could pay for the food and I had to pay for everything else. And I did. I was doing my parents taxes when I was a teenager in high school. I had my own two or three little dog-oriented businesses and a couple years I probably made as much as my father did legally.

LM: Well tell us a little bit about the dog—.

CD: The dog stuff? I wanted to be a veterinarian at a very early age. In my head what I wanted to do was to go to Tuskegee which was the only Black veterinary school in the country. So I was busy collecting everything. And there was a—I can't remember her name—there was a Black woman who grew up here in Asheville who did go to Tuskegee and was a veterinarian. So at the time, there was an animal hospital here in Asheville on Banks Avenue, across from what Vortex Doughnuts is now, an empty parking lot now, an empty lot, and it was Dr. Selig. She was from Austria. She came over here after the war or something. She was the first woman veterinarian in North Carolina.

LM: Seely?

CD: Selig. I think it's S-e-l-i-g. He daughter's still around here someplace but I know she hated her mother.

LM: S-e-l-i-g?

CD: She was the first. And she was one tough Austrian cookie. With her Austrian accent. Ya? Somebody at work called me "sunshine" the other day, one of the managers, Stacy,

and I said, “That’s just funny,” and she said, “What?” and I said, “That was my first nickname at my first job where I didn’t do neighborhood stuff but I actually had to go to work. Dr. Selig called me sunshine.” Sunshine! Was ist das? [Laughter]. Pussies gut ( ).” So I wanted to be a vet and she let me come to her and there was another vet on Patton Avenue, Dr. Christensen, who had off and on been our family vet. Not that we were very good at animal care like nobody else was either around here. But they both would let me sit in their offices and read veterinary manuals and magazines and science and stuff like that.

LM: So you did that on your own?

CD: I was like eight, nine and ten. I would walk all the way there to do whatever. Selig also bred Champion boxers and I think Pekineses, she was in the whole AKC thing. She trained me to be a dog handler and do junior shows even though I couldn’t get around here anywhere and at some point—. My father was into Cocker Spaniels so we always had dogs but he had had a Cocker Spaniel that some judge had given him so when he got married, Micky the Cocker was—let’s see. Nineteen-fifties, presidents had Cocker Spaniels and middle class white people were supposed to have a house, picket fence, two point three children. I’m not really sure about that, a point three child, what that was all about. But they were also supposed to have a Cocker Spaniel. So Black people who were middle class wanted to have Hollywood dogs or whatever it is, so that meant Lassie, Collie dogs, there were two Collie dogs down the street.

LM: Rin Tin Tin?

CD: Rin Tin Tin, a German Shepherd and Dad did have a white German Shepherd. But some judge here gave him a Cocker Spaniel, which became—I was going to say second to God. [Laughter]. Let's say that even though my father was raised Baptist, he only went to church for funerals or weddings and that dog got jacked up. His mother was a witch that lived here when my Mama moved in and Mom was kind of like, behind the mama and the sister, she was like Cinderella in this house as far as I can tell. New bride coming in here being bossed around by two people who didn't think she was good enough to be in the family. But my mother loved animals and she didn't understand Cocker Spaniels from Mongrels, but she loved the dog. Dog was spoiled rotten because that was Daddy's Cocker Spaniel, when the dog was Cocker Spaniel. Dad always came in through the back but somebody gave him a ride home from the club and dropped him over here. The door was propped open, Grandmama was cleaning. Dog was excited because heard Daddy coming up the steps and came flying through here and they'd taken up the carpets and waxed the floor so he was sliding so he stopped, he grabbed the tablecloth and slid but it pulled Grandma's punchbowl off. So just as Daddy hit there, Grandma took a mop, swung, and hit the dog. Who didn't get killed but can be a drama queen. And Mom was on the floor scrubbing where she's been told. She's down there on her hands and knees and then when the dog went, "Yip, yip," Dad saw Grandma hit dog and saw Mommy grab and comfort dog. About three weeks later Grandma was out of this house along with her daughter and as long as we were growing up, she lived on Blanton Street. She could visit over there where her daughter was, she could come to the bottom of the steps, but our ass never allowed up those steps as long as we were alive. Mom decided, "Steak for the dog." [Laughter]. We would be eating like, pork and beans out of a can, Dog would

be eating steak. My father's cousin, that he really loved, made the mistake of pushing the dog off the couch one time so she could stretch out. She got banned for six months. [Laughter]. Dr. Selig gave me an English Cocker and I think he was the only registered AKC English Cocker on this end of the state at the time. Somebody in Biltmore Forest had flipped out because their home had been chosen as a house to be photographed for Southern Homes and Gardens. So I have never understood this—she had two or three beautiful children and this gorgeous dog, and a magnificent home and garden that got picked for a photo outlay, so the minute it got picked she decided to redecorate the whole house. If your house had just been picked, would you redecorate? My father said, "White trash. Whatever." So the dog was playing with the children outside while the painting was going on and the children and the dog went running through the house and turned over a paint can and tracked it through some carpets and stuff. So apparently she assaulted two of the three kids, but she threw all three children and the dog into the car and brought them to Dr. Selig and told her to kill the dog. Dr. Selig said, "Go get the papers and bring the papers and I will have the dog dead by evening." So I got the papers along with the dog. The husband came home and almost killed her, cancelled the photo shoot or whatever it is, and came to Dr. Selig and said, "Did you kill the dog?" and she said, "No, but I have transferred dog to person who will appreciate." [Laughter].

LM: You did her accent really well.

CD: Well no, that was more Russian than it was German. But anyway, I got the dog and so that became my first show dog and a breeding stud and whatever it is. I made quite a bit of money off of it.

LM: Through breeding?

CD: Breeding. Yeah, if your dog does well in a show and you have a decent pedigree then the money comes from stud fees.

LM: So where did you show the dog?

CD: I had to do mostly a handler, pay a handler to take him, because I wasn't good enough and they weren't going to let a little Black kid who hadn't gone through the ranks. They still don't have that many of them, there's a few. But there were a couple of handlers who did travel with the dogs, they did several dogs at one time. That's always the case where you have a breeder. You see now if you do AKC shows, you see more owner/handlers but you still see more than half where it's just a handler that's got several dogs that they show for several people. So Nero went out on the road and he got a good reputation but every once in a while, Daddy walked him downtown and stuff like that. He was so puffed up.

LM: What other kind of animals did you have around the house?

CD: Mutts, mongrels. Around here we had all kinds of dogs and cats. We had dogs and cats that just came around. Every once in awhile they would be too many of them and Dad would clean them out and I'd freak out. I came home one time and he'd cleaned out—we had a terrier who kept having puppies because nobody got their animals fixed, and we had two cats or one cat that kept having kittens, because nobody ever got their animals fixed. He got tired of it so he came home and got rid of them all and I came home from school and none of them were here and I went hysterically blind, couldn't see,

blind as a bat. I thought, “Okay, I’m not going to freak out. I’m going to walk back in my room and think about this, because clearly I’m blind.” And Mom comes home from work and I’m sitting back in my room blind as a bat and she figures out that her kid can’t see and she’s like, “Aaaaa,” and she also figures out where are all the critters, right? Because she wasn’t putting critters with blind, so of course we go through a whole lot of medical, which Daddy had to pay for to find out why a child who apparently had no vision problems, now is blind as a bat, and finally the shrinks, because no Black people go to shrinks. But the shrink’s going, “Your child is hysterical because you got rid of her pets.” And my parents go, “What?” Mom wasn’t happy about it either but Dad was like, “What?” And it’s like, “Here’s the bad news, she’s probably not going to regain her vision until you get the pets back. And in her case, she’s going to have to be able to tell with her nose that it’s her pets and not just pets.” So for the people that took the pets, it was go and retrieve. So the guy who did the grounds, the guys that used to have the mule cart and sold vegetables, those were easy to retrieve. But the ones that went to the pound, that was a different one. He was lucky none of them got put down because I probably wasn’t going to see until they were all back. And Marge wasn’t going to give him any peace because he had blinded her child.

LM: You’d think he would’ve know that would upset you.

CD: That a child like me would probably go hysterical? If he even knew that was a possibility, he would have, you know, because I’m an extreme human being. He could’ve figured it out.

LM: So you said you were an emancipated minor?

CD: They didn't go to court and do it but essentially the deal was I didn't have to ask permission to do stuff, I just had to let my parents know where I was and the deal was don't embarrass your family on the streets. And most of us, I mean that was the Dendy kid thing. My girlfriend said, "You guys were always well behaved when you stepped out, it was when you went home that you were devils." I can hear tea kettle. Lemon tea? Yes, quick?

LM: Please. Thank you. I appreciate that. I'm going to turn this thing off though.

[Recording paused].

CD: We were like coming here before you throw it away for dinner. Most of the time we cooked dinner because she worked too. So you could take your plate, go with television or go out on the porch or whatever. But Sunday you sat for meals and that was like training time. Whether you had guests or not, it was training time because the idea is that you're not supposed to be able to send children out in the world so that they can be embarrassed. So if you're raising them up to be a class over you, they have to be able to understand the silverware comes in this way, sometimes that way and what these things are for. And you're going to have to eat all this stuff because white people are going to feed you funny stuff. No making noses, no rolling your eyes. You need to at least know what something is so we had stuff like artichokes and Eggs Benedict or we also chocolate covered bugs and all of that. [Laughter]. It was kind of like, "Okay, Marge, really have I got to eat this?" "Yes, you could always decide later that you don't like anything but I don't want to hear you don't like something if you haven't tried it." But anyways, some of the folks in Biltmore were first wives, second wives, trophy wife. And sometimes they

would fall for someone that they were serious about but that person wasn't in the same class and there wasn't like a school to take someone raised in a trailer park essentially and turn her into someone who was country club. But they could sit down with Marge and Marge would them through the situations. So I'd be like downtown at the mall or something like that and I would see some elegant lady and the next thing I would hear, "Cissy!" [Laughter]. And I'm like, "Calm down. How are you? Nice seeing you again." ( ) "Hi. How are you baby?'

LM: You may have mentioned—you said your mother worked. Tell me again.

CD: What did she do? Lots of things. When we were growing up she was housekeeper at various houses, to include the house at the Biltmore Estate where Judge Adams lived, when he was the manager of the estate. She was his housekeeper and did cooking for catering parties for Biltmore Forest and other places they were having fancy dinner parties. She did hair in a Black salon downtown and she also did hair at the house. And then I guess when we were in high school was when she was—she always wanted to be a nurse and she'd never gotten farther than high school. In my father's family, where he had a sister who had a master's degree and another brother who was an M.D., they were educated people. My mother's family were entrepreneurs, they owned small businesses or whatever and they very seldom had anything that was over high school in education, which was one of the reasons they ( ) Mom was that kind of person kind of thing. So she was whining about it and I said, "You're a smart person, obviously, so you've got children who do their own cooking, take care of the house and the yard, have jobs, so it's not like you have to be hanging around for us. And you know Daddy, as long as you're paying your share of the bills around here, he doesn't care what you do, right? So it's not

like there's anybody going to stop you. The only person stopping you is you." And then of course what they were offering then was called L.P.N., Licensed Practical Nurse, which is more like CNAs now, at A.B. Tech which was pretty much all white except for the janitors. They didn't have any Black teachers in the mid-sixties. And I'm like, "Okay, here's the deal. I am really tired of this. You don't let me get away with it. Turnabouts ( ). Go down there and see if you can get in that school." And then it turned out that was the one class where they did have five or six Black women at the same time. So she joined that class and she pretty much made straight As. Turns out she's better at Science than any of her kids, in terms of Chemistry or Biology. So she became an LPN. I brought her annual, she graduated in 1966 from AB. And that's what she was until she died. She got so good that she was the nurse—remember when Asheville School was Asheville School for Boys?

LM: No.

CD: It used to be you had to be a rich white boy essentially to go there. Even a rich white girl couldn't go there, it was Asheville School for Boys, a private school. And I think that was the first time I ever saw a Mercedes station wagon, there was a little Arab Sheik out there. I don't know how his daddy found out about the place but he was there. He was terrified like all little kids, far away from home, foreign culture, whatever it is, and Mom was the school nurse and they had their own little cottage out there, where they had a little infirmary with two or three beds and a place for the nurse to stay overnight and stuff like that. She liked being out there, she could knit and read and get away from here, right? But this little kid attached to her and wanted to be with her whenever he wasn't in class so she had a nice car but the father was like, the car wasn't good enough for his son.

So of course this ten or eleven or whatever he was couldn't have a driver license, so he bought like a Mercedes station wagon, parked it out there and gave Mom the keys and said, "Let him go with you when you want to and drive that." Marge could drive, you know. Marge's nickname was, where was it, the ( ) movie, Fireball Roberts and Banjo Matthews, early stock car drivers, race car drivers, because both of them drove like bats out of hell on Sunday like this. Rest of the time, get out of the way. [Laughter]. So that's Sourwood honey, you guys know that, right? Do you like Sourwood?

LM: I love Sourwood.

CD: Sourwood honey and Lemon Zinger tea, ladies. Knock yourself out.

LM: Thank you so much.

CD: And the bags can get squeezed out.

LM: I should know this, Cissy, but were most of the students at Allen from near here? From Asheville?

CD: No. I'm going to guess by the time I was there, probably twenty per cent were local. Maybe twenty to thirty per cent were local and everybody else was from out of town. Because they had a dormitory.

LM: From Western North Carolina, or from other states?

CD: No, no, no. Originally it was set up to do education, I guess, so people could do housework and do other things and back in the day could get into the good homes. But it turned into this high academic thing and so you had block doctors and lawyers in places

like New York, and Chicago and all those places sending their girls here too. Because I went to school with girls that were from New York and Texas and all these other damn places, mostly professional parents. But Allen was highly ranked academically so they were sending them here. Which is why we ended up with somebody from Allen being one of computers at NASA.

LM: I'm going to get some more honey. I think it will be good for me.

CD: It will be. That's the thing that you need for your throat.

LM: When my mother's coming to visit I always have to find her some Sourwood. She loves it.

CD: Sourwood? It's only available at certain times of the year. The folks out at the farmer's market have some of the best.

LM: Let's see. So your mother did a variety of different things and you said she was a housekeeper sometimes and where did you say she was a housekeeper?

CD: The Biltmore Estate.

LM: The Biltmore Estate.

CD: If you've been out there, the main hotel, not the new one, but the big hotel that they built out there. When you come down that driveway to hit the road that then takes you out, you see a really pretty large house with a picket fence around it. That's where the owner lives now, Cecil lives there now. But that was where Judge Adams lived when

Mom was working there, because he was the manager of the estate at the time. And that used to be my hangout.

LM: Really.

CD: Oh Lord, yes. I was this little Black kid. You're getting the idea, right? So I know I turned ten while Mom was working there so we're talking fifty-eight but I was out there off and on. Butch said he was out there some too, but not like me because I was Mom's sidekick. And the better part of being it, because Mom had to work, was that Judge Adams" wife, whose first name I do know, but when you're a little kid she's just Miss Adams. She had grown children and grandkids who lived in Biltmore Forest, but I never saw them around. He doted on her, she was like this wife whose husband doted on her and she was a critter lover. Anybody who's a critter lover, prefers critters to humans is who I like. She had a little mutt named George and I had a killer mutt named Smoky. Smoky was actually very well behaved but very, very protective of me. So me and Smoke and George and Miss Adams would roam the estate which was mostly a dairy farm. She didn't like the fact the people hunted deer and stuff like that, that people from Biltmore Forest are always screaming and hollering—they still are—about the deer eating up their plants and all. So she was into building deer blinds and feeding the deer to attract them all onto the estate which was driving the cattle crazy. She didn't care and her husband didn't stop her and she just needed a little bit of help. Also, feeding birds and stuff like that and baking stuff and trashing the kitchen, which my mother then had to clean. And me and her liked to roam and of course both dogs, particularly George were into chasing skunks, so got skunked one time, all four of us and came trotting back to the house to my mother standing at the back door like, "Oh no, hm, hm, hm. None of y'all."

And I was like, “It’s her house, you work for her.” “No I do not, I work for the judge.” So this is called, call that man at his office which was in the Biltmore Estate house itself, there’s the courtyard where the garage is and it used to be the stables and all that and now they got the bakery and all the gift stores. Above that was where his office was. So call him and say, “Come home because we have a problem.” And meanwhile the guys who work the ranch and everything else, “Mm mm. Something’s going on down there.” Because we’re out in back and she’s just, “No you are not.” So it’s going to be, “Bring big wash basins. You, me and two others are going to buy all the tomato juice in Western North Carolina. Them two are going to get buck naked and get in the tub and then we’ll get the dogs. And no one’s coming in this house until they’ve all been tomato-juiced with the bowls.” [Laughter]. Miss Adams was like, “I am not,” and Mom said, “If you’re coming in this house you are.” And the Judge says, “Marge is right. You’re not coming in here.” [Laughter].

LM: Miss Adams got butt naked too? [Laughter].

CD: Me and her had to get buck naked, behind the shed to get in the thing together. Mommy’s talking to the Judge and she’s like, “You know, we don't need to have them both together all the time,” and he said, “I know but if she’s out of school and you come without her, you know my wife’s going to send you back to get her.” A couple times she had a lot of work to do and I actually had something I was doing and she had to come back over here and get me, like, “You have to come out there and play with your little partner.” And so she decided she was going to give me a tenth birthday party and Mom said, “She won’t let me give her a birthday party. She hates birthday parties. You can’t give her a birthday party,” and Miss Adams said, “I can give her a birthday party because

I'm not inviting children. She can't stand them and I'm not that fond of them either." [Laughter]. Birthday party. Alfalfa cake with whipped cream for me and the cats from the cat farm, which is that building that's behind Deerfield. [Laughter]. She's don't like kids and I ain't fond of them either, so we were going to be fine.

LM: Did you stay in touch with her after?

CD: No, I didn't. The sad thing is that I didn't with them either after Mom stopped being there. The thing that I also remember is that I was at Hill Street and there was an exhibit coming through on a train from the Smithsonian. It was traveling the southeast, I think it was a science exhibit but I'm not sure. But of course it was coming in to Asheville and they brought it into the Biltmore Estate and they only took white children from the white schools. Segregated schools, right? Of course there wouldn't be any Black kids who need to see this. So Dad didn't get involved in it so much as Judge Adams, who was incensed because they used to have real books in the Biltmore House. They are now not there to protect them, what you see when you go in the library is the bindings but the books aren't there. But they had real books in there and part of the year they actually would have people come in from other countries to study like the bird books or something like that. I would be in the house with them by myself with my dog. In fact, I would be in the house with just my dog hanging out on those little chaise lounges with my little lunch, with the doors open so I could see ( ) and the bats upstairs. Scared me to death because my dog, I was scared she was going to get rabies from the bats. The judge would let me sit in there and he would bring a book down and show me how to handle a book and let me read books. Remember, I couldn't go to the Pack Library because that was segregated too, so he was like, "I can tell you how to handle these things and you can sit in here," and I said,

"Why can't George come in too?" He said, "George is not well behaved. Smoky is. Smoky's not going to tear up everything. I used to roam through that place all by myself all the time. Butch did too when Daddy worked over there doing parties. But he decided that this was—he said, "The only kid I know that likes reading and science more than you is one of mine and this is not right." So the head of the Southern Railway was also a member of the country club and a friend of Dad's and so he said, "Can you get your car and pull that damn car up on the estate?" So, yes. Carleton White was the owner of White Transportation Bus and was also a friend of Dad's. "Can you get a bus? You'll going to go to Hill Street School, you're going get her whole damn class. We will provide lunch for the children and her whole damn class is getting to go on that train. We're going to haul that whole car up into the Biltmore Estate and we'll have a picnic right here." So my class and I got to see the exhibit but none of the other Black kids did. So that was like a very special thing. Because this was like a bunch of guys taking a look at a little kid who was into science and stuff who was being blocked because of her race. And they said, "This is not right." They didn't get all the other Black kids in, but they managed to get my whole class in which was very special. And I should have but I was a kid, you move on.

LM: What grade did you start at Allen?

CD: Ninth. First through eighth at Hill Street and then ninth through twelfth at Allen. [Pause]. But I had a lot of fun. Since I got back here in 2003, I seen Judge's son and his grandson. We all went out for drinks a couple times. His son said, "I remember you. You used to come over to our house." His sister had some kind of disability, I forgot what it was. They had a library in the house. When Mom worked in the big houses, if they had libraries that was part of the condition, I get to take books home for my kid. "What's she

interested in?" "Doesn't matter. I'll take five or six home at a time, she'll read them, I'll bring them back. If we've got questions, we'll ask." So that was always part of the deal. If she could take me with her, she could park me in the library and I was just going to sit there and read until she came and got me. I managed to get locked in Pack Square one time, got locked in the New York Public Library at the main branch one time.

LM: Way to go.

CD: Hey. If somebody's blocking you from a stupid book for God's sake, I'm like, "What am I going to do? I'm just going to read. I'm not hurting anybody, I just want to read. Lord." And my mother was like that. She's just sit there and take a book. She came to visit me one time in California and I had one of those bookshelves from floor to ceiling, six foot, like you have in a library. She just started, when ever I'd go to work, she just started reading. My girlfriend said, "What's she going to do?" and I said, "She'll be here for about a month. She'll get everything on that bookshelf read. Every time we'd leave her she'd pick up a book ( ).

LM: So you couldn't go to the Pack Library and you went to the Black Library.

CD: The one at the YMI.

LM: Oh, it was at the YMI.

CD: It was one room.

LM: Just one room.

CD: Yeah. And the way it was, the books circulated so like books came into Pack, and then when everybody stopped checking them out, they could rotate down to us if someone requested them. So you'd have to know it was there to request it at the time, to get it down. But there was a toy store on Pritchard Park, it was called Brody's ( ) and in addition to toys they carried books. So my first charge account, because we didn't have school buses to drive us from here over to—we weren't actually supposed to be at Hill Street. We were supposed to be at Mountain Street but my parents liked Hill Street better. So we were at Hill Street so they gave us bus fare to take the bus and come to Pritchard Park where the buses circle around and then you'd take a bus to come this way. Half the time we'd take the bus fare and keep it and just walk. Mrs. Brody didn't like me all that much. Mr. Brody liked me so what I told him was, if I really like a book I don't like taking it back. He goes, "I understand that." And I said, "So, can you order it for me?" And he says, "Yeah, and I said, "You need to tell me how much and then I'll pay you and then you'll order it," and he says, "No. You tell me which book, I'm going to order it and you're going to pay me on time. You're going to have your own account." I said, "Really?" and he said, "Yeah. Every week you're going to make a payment and I'll keep track." And she couldn't stand me but if I didn't see him—I would just duck my little head in there and if I didn't see him I'd duck my head back out and go on home. I was changing busses and I'm like, "Let me duck my head in and if I see him, I'll make my little payment and get on with it." And then I'd get that one paid for and it'd be time for the next one. My first charge account was to get books at Brody's ( ). The post office was in what's old the federal building, that's now across from—like Wall Street comes into and then the post office building was right there. That was the post office building and I

had savings stamps, so you buy the little stamps and fill up the book. I still have some. I'd get my little savings stamp and then go pay my payment on my book and then I could go home. The other part of that was there was a music store right there and you could buy records but you also buy sheet music. I couldn't play an instrument or anything, couldn't read music. Mom did. But you could go get records and then the one that was the classical one was the one that's where the ABC Store is now on South Charlotte, you know there's like South Charlotte becomes Valley Street. There used to be a store there that sold classical music and if I could remember how to whistle or to sing it I could go in there whistle or sing it and the guy would give me the album. That's what he told Mom one time, "You know you've got a kid in here who completely can whistle the eighteen variations of the theme of Paganini." She goes, "You called me about that?" "I'm just letting you know." And she said, "That's my child. I know what she does." [Laughter].

LM: So you shopped downtown a lot. You're whole family shopped downtown?

CD: Well, Sears was downtown. Here's the thing, you went downtown because you paid bills downtown. We had to go downtown because we were coming from Hill Street from downtown. Everybody hung out at Pack Square because you hung out around the corner from the block. We went to the movies at the Plaza. There was another movie theater, seems to me there was a movie theater on—that's Patton Avenue, right, from Vance Monument to Pritchard Park? That is Patton Avenue. There's a parking lot there now and there used to be movie theater there. And if I remember correctly, it was a segregated movie theater. But if I remember correctly also it was owned by one of my father's friends, so if you really wanted to go, you had to go with Dad. The blessing was you really wanted to go if it was some cheesy horror picture. If you could sit through this you

would get cheap dishes at the end of it. And Daddy like cheap horror pictures. He wouldn't drive but he'd walk you from here to there and if he wanted to see it, his friend would close the theater and we could go into the theater and we would be served in our seats instead of having to go to the concession stand and then you could watch the movie. We had a private showing. Being Daddy's kid was not bad.

LM: He had a lot of connections.

CD: A lot of connections, and if you ticked off Dad, or if he heard you were abusive or verbal to one of his kids, you could lose your job. Push it and you could get something worse than that. Like I said, it wasn't bad being Dad's kid.

LM: I had a person tell me that was the Imperial Theater on Patton?

CD: Might have been.

LM: Because they didn't have a back entrance?

CD: They didn't have a balcony.

LM: So Blacks weren't allowed in that and they more often went to the Plaza where there was a back entrance where they could—.

CD: Well it wasn't that it was a back entrance, it had to be separate seating, so it had to have a back entrance to a balcony, which the Plaza had and what happened that was annoying, is let's say there was something really popular from Disney or something that came in, and more white kids wanted in than the downstairs would fit, we might have

paid and got our seats but it was like that Chinese guy on that plane the other day, you'd actually be tossed out so the white kids could have the balcony.

LM: You're kidding.

CD: No, I'm not kidding.

LM: Even if you paid, you could get tossed out.

CD: That's right, if it was a popular film and the whites wanted to see, chick, you got out. So I got out of here a lot of summers to go to New Jersey and New York, they didn't have people play that game. Mom said every once in a while the kids need to stand down from this crap, so let's just send them off. So I did. I spent more time in New Jersey and New York than my brothers did because I actually was being pushed a little harder. The boys were a lot better at taking it than I was, but nobody wanted me to snap because I had a good reputation—.

LM: For snapping. [Laughter.]

CD: No, no, no, not for snapping. I had a good reputation and if you're middle class in the fifties and dealing with segregation and you had boys and girls in the family, girls had a chance to go farther than boys. That was true in the thirties and forties, so you try to do the best by the girl in terms of education and stuff first, and then you catch the boys later because they weren't going to have nearly as much chance as girls" progress.

LM: Well that's just the opposite the way it's been in the white community.

CD: Yeah, girls got crapped on more than boys. For a middle class Black girl, you actually got more of a push from the family because you had a chance to go farther. And if you were smarter than dog shit—. If you were smarter than dog shit, the whole family could get behind you.

LM: Now there's a phrase.

CD: ( ) this side. I was trying to find her daughter, who I think lives out near Brevard and I said something to the people who were doing the history for the Manna Reynolds group, about her and I said, "This is where she lived when I was growing up and I worked for her as a teenager—.'

LM: What was her name?

CD: Daria Obolensky and her married name was Morgan. Who she is like a second cousin to the last czar of Russia. So between the crazy Austrian and Daria Obolensky, I had—. Listen, when I was stationed overseas I got to be one of the first going into the U.S.S.R. when they opened up the official tourist bureau, so I was like, "Yo Daria, so what should I see? Not the stuff they want me to see, but what should I see?" So I found a letter when I was cleaning out stuff back here where she'd written a note to my mother going, "Marge, I'm worried about our Cissy because she's not going to keep her mouth shut over there." [Laughter]. I could've died Did she think the commies would do something bad to me? Everybody else thought I was a commie but she was like, "We know that Cissy's not going to—hmmm ( )." Her daughter I know is somewhere around here. She's retired and I think living out near Brevard. We figured out which house it was over there that she lived in because her son, I think he's still around here too. He's a

conservative, runs a conservative newspaper, David Morgan. And the family used to own the big furniture company, furniture factory, something like that. David ( ) his byline on one of the freebie conservative newspapers. But their Mom was a character. Seriously. And she's like a sister-in-law to Colonel Morgan.

LM: Yes, the famous Colonel Morgan. [Laughter.]

CD: The famous Colonel Morgan.

LM: Yeah, we have to get that on tape someday.

CD: Come see the picture in the thing.

LM: I'm going to turn it off.

CD: You can turn it off.

END OF INTERVIEW.